

*For students:*

- the courses delivered and qualifications obtained comply with the international standards in terms of design, delivery and quality assurance. Students are apt to participate in international academic mobility, which results in a more compatible credit transfer at their home universities;
- students become involved in the programme self-evaluation procedure and provide feedback on how to improve and refine the course and curriculum design and create student-friendly learning environment;
- the programme handbook gives students a clear understanding of the programme objectives and learning outcomes, curriculum structure, teaching methods and assessment criteria. This increases students' awareness, enriches learning experiences, and adds value to the understanding, achievement and measurement achievement of the learning outcomes;
- students receive international recognition of their achievements and get more opportunities to take part in national and international academic mobility programmes;
- due to alignment mechanisms and approaches there is a greater transparency of the value and credibility of qualifications and job entry requirements between an international employer and a national student.

*For staff:*

Over the three-year period of ALIGN project delivery, the teaching and administration staff of Russian HEIs have gained valuable experience in terms of further implementation of the principles of Bologna Process into the Russian educational environment. As a result, Russian Universities have made a serious progress in aligning the

academic programmes, learning outcomes and qualification frameworks and embedding those into the university daily agenda.

The ALIGN project provided the university teaching staff with a unique opportunity to learn and test current European approaches, principles of curriculum and course design, student-centered learning, new teaching methods and e-learning.

Due to ALIGN the staff from Russian HEIs have built capacity for:

- aligning EQF and NQF in higher education;
- aligning European requirements for programme design with the RF educational standards;
- aligning international and national educational standards with occupational standards;
- writing and assessing programme and module learning outcomes;
- aligning learning outcomes with teaching and assessment strategies;
- developing module descriptors;
- developing programme handbooks (Annex 1, Annex 2);
- better understanding of quality assurance policy due to in-service training programmes;
- using different instruments of quality assurance for self-evaluation (SWOT analysis, benchmarking, etc.).
- the staff participated in international mobility and continuous professional development.

*For universities:*

Participation in ALIGN project gave an opportunity to test and then implement the principles of alignment of the programmes with European Qualifications Framework. The 'pilot' Master's degree programmes selected for the project at each University were thoroughly reviewed by the international team of experts. As a result, the align-

ment of 2 Master's degree programmes from NArFU ("Applied Linguistics: Teaching English as a Foreign Language" and "Ecology and Environmental Management, Environmental Risk Management in the Arctic (ERMA)") and

1 Master's degree programme from Volga Tech ("Quality Management in Agriculture and Food Industry"), as well as their Quality Assurance Processes, were accredited for a period of 6 years.

The experience of self-evaluation undertaken in ALIGN project was also of great value for the current and future policies of quality assurance, especially for public accreditation. Self-evaluation procedure of the pilot programmes, SWOT analysis and benchmarking have revealed strengths and weaknesses in quality assurance system of HEIs. The Universities' policy of quality assurance has been revised and improved. This helped increase efficiency and effectiveness in the management and delivery of the core business of the university.

### *For the sector:*

Employers have benefits as a result of Alignment in terms of dissemination of the good practices compatible with the European experience.

The development of modern practice-oriented higher education has always been one of the Russian HEIs priorities, the ALIGN project has strengthened this focus. The universities develop collaboration with the industry and the public sector, which is particularly important at a Master's level.

The 'pilot' Master's degree programmes within ALIGN project are also good practices in collaboration with the 'real economy' sector, such as agriculture, food industry, restaurant businesses, public certification services and customer NGOs (for the programme 'Quality Management in Agriculture and Food Industry'), timber pro-

duction, forestry expertise, national parks and reserved territories, tourism, and environmental NGOs (for the programme 'International Cooperation in Forestry and Nature Management'). Both 'pilot' programmes were designed in cooperation with employers, and there is a regular feedback obtained from employers, graduates and the teaching staff using various information channels.

### UKRAINE<sup>3</sup>

The benefits for HEIs include, but are not limited to the following:

*For students:*

- Introducing student-oriented approach to training and teaching based on achievement of learning outcomes;
- a stronger focus throughout the university on increasing student learning opportunities, enriching student learning experiences, and raising the value of learning outcomes;
- a greater understanding and international recognition of achievements (in academia, professions and employers);
- transparency and fairness of assessment of learning outcomes;
- enforcement of students' role in the development and evaluation of their courses and learning environment;
- greater opportunities for national / international exchange and mobility;
- providing information support to students and increase of the level of transparency of academic programmes through the development of handbooks;
- acquiring qualification that will allow graduates to continue their studies or confidently enter the labor market and start to build a successful career;

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<sup>3</sup>The detailed information can be found in "THE NATIONAL REPORT FOR UKRAINE"

- facilitating the transition from education to life-long learning.

*For staff:*

- active participation in development and monitoring of academic programmes;
- focus on student learning outcomes, more opportunities to introduce innovation teaching methods;
- a clear understanding that each element of an AP should provide for achievement of its objectives and intended LOs;
- possibility to select an effective teaching strategy focused at intended LOs, define methods and forms of training, pick supportive technologies necessary for development of agreed competences;
- greater support for continuous professional development, recognition of professionalism and opportunities to innovate in teaching and learning;
- the possibility of forming interdisciplinary educational programs and new courses;
- for non-academic staff – development of professional competences in the field of quality assurance system using modern methods and tools, best European standards;
- understanding of the priority and importance of learning outcomes in organization of educational activity;
- large-scale involvement of staff to the procedures of internal quality assurance.

*For universities:*

- ability to ‘internationalize’ the university community; through staff and student recruitment, internationalization of the curriculum, dual degrees, joint research projects, etc.;
- increased efficiency and effectiveness (educationally and

- economically) in the management and delivery of educational services of the university;
- greater ethical security in all teaching learning and student assessment processes, based upon transparency and collegiate responsibility for quality;
  - enforcement of interaction between HEIs and labour market by means of involving employers in the processes of design, monitoring and review of academic programmes;
  - harmonization of the interests of external and internal stakeholders while designing the academic programme;
  - facilitating development of the internal quality assurance system;
  - promotion recognition of competencies acquired as a result of the non-formal/informal education;
  - driving up the demand for educational services of certain academic programmes in a certain HEI.

*For the sector:*

- establishing correspondence and relevance of the national education qualification system to other foreign counterparts and, above all, the European Qualification Frameworks;
- stylization of educational and professional standards regarding the level, quality and scope of knowledge, skills and abilities of students that will allow them get employed according to the acquired professional qualification recognized by the competent authority;
- higher international esteem for the quality of the country's universities;
- increased public and employer confidence in the work and value of the higher education sector;
- promotion of European culture of quality assurance and enhancement in the national higher educational system;

- increasing the level of internationalization of national higher education system on the base of effective and sustainable partnership between Ukrainian and foreign HEIs;
- strengthening connections between key national stakeholders of higher education on different levels of the system both in academic environment and also with the Ministry of Education and Science, student environment and labour market;
- facilitating development of proper and clear criteria for the procedures of external evaluation and accreditation and licensing.

*For applicants:*

- providing information support to students and increase of the level of transparency of academic programmes through the development of handbooks;
- a more clear picture on the possibilities for employment according to the developed competences;
- providing information on the possibilities of academic mobility in frames of a particular academic programme.

## ALIGNMENT: RECOMMENDATIONS

Within WP4 of ALIGN workplan pilot of alignment tools was envisaged which assumes pilot of alignment tools, self-assessment of revised academic programs and external evaluation by expert panel comprised of EU and local experts. HEIs successfully carried out self-analysis according to the 20 criteria provided by the lead partner of W4 Bath Spa University.

### *Alignment of Academic Programs (10 indicators of good practice)*

1. The academic programs are properly titled and lead to awards at the appropriate level, consistent with European and national frameworks for higher education qualifications, and the Dublin Descriptors for Masters' awards.
2. The academic programs are informed by and consistent with professional/industry standards/requirements, where appropriate.
3. The aims of the programs are appropriate for the student intake, and can be realized through students' attainment of the program/module learning outcomes.
4. All learning outcomes at module level are at the appropriate level, and are assessed through fair, valid and reliable student assignments/tests.
5. Throughout their course of study, students are able to monitor their academic progress and development, and receive advice on how they can improve and enhance their work.
6. The teaching and learning activities employed within the modules are informed by reflection on professional practices, and designed to enable students to develop the knowledge, skills, abilities and professional competencies that will enable them to achieve the modules' learning outcomes.
7. The structure of the program ensures the progression of

- students' learning, and provides appropriate opportunities for student choice.
8. The credits ratings (national and ECTS) for modules are properly aligned with the designated student workloads for the modules.
  9. Students are provided with clear and current information about the learning opportunities and support available to them.
  10. The design, delivery and monitoring of the academic programs is 'student centered', engaging students collectively and individually as partners in the development, assurance and enhancement of their educational experiences (e.g., through effective representation of the student voice, discussions about opportunities for course enhancement, involvement in quality assurance processes, and the monitoring and evaluation of student experiences).

### *Alignment of Quality Assurance Processes (10 indicators of good practice)*

1. There are clear criteria against which academic programs are assessed in the program approval, monitoring and review processes.
2. The roles and responsibilities for program design, development, approval and monitoring are clearly articulated.
3. Students are involved in program design and in the processes of program development, approval, monitoring and review.
4. There are effective policies which ensure that the academic standards for credits and awards are rigorously maintained at the appropriate level, and that student performance is judged against these standards.
5. There are clear and effective policies and processes for assessing the recognition of prior learning and supporting student mobility between courses of study and institutions.

6. Knowledge of professional standards/requirements and external expertise (e.g., from subject experts, employers and professional associations) is used to inform the design, development, approval and monitoring of academic programs.
7. There are appropriate arrangements to train and support academic and professional/administrative staff who are involved in the design, delivery, approval and monitoring of academic programs.
8. There are clear policies and processes in place to ensure the integrity of student assessment (e.g., through marking schemes, moderation processes, examination board regulations), and the effectiveness of these policies is regularly reviewed.
9. The policies and processes of program design, development, approval and monitoring are regularly reviewed in order to ensure the effectiveness and continuous enhancement of current practices.
10. There are effective policies in place to ensure that staff appointed to teach and support student learning on academic programs are appropriately qualified, and that delivery of the programs is supported by the appropriate learning resources.

In June, September and November 2016 EU experts, experts from QA Agencies and correspondingly local experts from each HEI conducted site-visits to partner HEIs in Armenia, Russia and Ukraine for the external evaluation of the revised academic programs according to the criteria mentioned above. During site-visits expert panel members had meetings with academic program leaders, teaching staff, students and alumni.

After conducting site-visit the expert panel prepared expert panel reports separately for each academic program mentioning strong and weak points of the academic programs as well as giving

recommendations for further improvement.

After the evaluation of the 9 academic programs (3 per country) general recommendations for the Governments and HEIs of Armenia, Russia and Ukraine were outlines by UE experts. Some of those recommendations are listed below:

- ✓ *The need for continued development of each territory's NFQ.*

All territories have started this process, but the NFQs need ongoing work and refinement - a lot of beefing up and clarification. Where possible, that the territorial NFQs work towards international recognition.

- ✓ *The need for a 'correct' and clear, internationally understandable description of awards? - Bachelors, Masters and PhD.*

Any territory with 'professional' (lesser) awards will have to wrestle with fitting those into international structures like Bologna.

- ✓ *Each territory must decide on whether it is going for, or moving towards self-accreditation, Ministry accreditation, or agency accreditation, licensing, a mixture of these systems, or parallel systems? How is accreditation/validation going to be rolled out and blended.*

- ✓ *Each territory must decide on the relationship between internal and external QA*

- ✓ *Academic autonomy – each HEI has the right to design and implement their own academic programs and has responsibility to provide quality of education for these programmes? That means that qualification resulting from a programme should be clearly and understandable to all stakeholders, but especially to the student stakeholders. All qualifications should clearly relate to the correct level of the NQF and, consequently to the Framework for Qualification of the EHEA.*

- ✓ *The need to establish regular (every 5 years) peer review processes - separately for academic programmes and for*

*HEI's.* These peer review panels will involve EU or international experts? It must be decided how many EU or international experts on each panel? Two is quite normal? In some territories (e.g. Lietuva and Croatia), the agencies prefer EU panel members to Chair the peer review panels.

- ✓ *How will the powers, responsibilities and terms of reference of the peer review panels be legally constituted in each territory?* Early peer reviews MIGHT (for the first two cycles (10 years)) be more developmental than regulatory (more like what we've just done with ALIGN). Everyone involved (HEIs, students, stakeholders, agency, Ministry etc) will need some time to work into the culture of peer review.
- ✓ *If professional standards are to be developed and implemented, they must be created with Professional bodies and according to the local market and with the assistance of the best foreign practices.* The best option - professional standards must be prepared in two languages: local and English. Any territory-specific Professional standards need to be transparent for students, HEIs, agencies, stakeholders (industries/employers) and international partners.
- ✓ *National Student Survey for final-year students – these tools can help to know about:*
  - The quality of the teaching and learning experience that universities provide;
  - whether academic program goals are achieved or not achieved during the study program;
  - what HEIs need to change or improve in their academic programs.
- ✓ *At the HEI level, involvement of students needs a lot of work.* All the HEIs are gathering student info and are encouraging 'student self-government', but with no clear notion as to HOW student voice should be heard, or even what should be done with the information gathered from student surveys. Are the HEIs listening to students and acting on their feedback and concerns where this is appropriate? Can students clear-

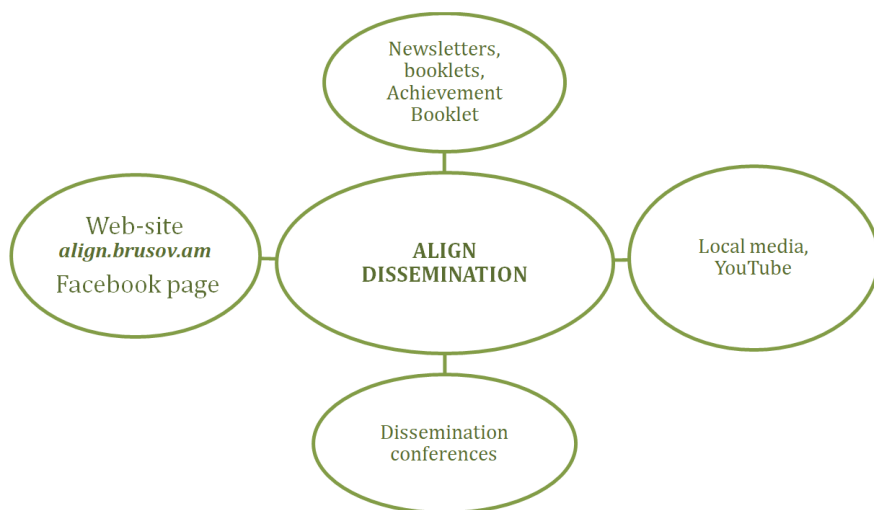
ly see the impact of their inputs and expressions of concern?

- ✓ *At HEI and national level, the Student Unions need autonomy and need to develop the student voice and student representation for themselves.*
- ✓ *All HEIs and programmes should be encouraged to move towards formal links with stakeholders, industry and employers - including MoES, short contracts, QA supervision, insurance, health and safety etc., clear for employers, lecturers, HEIs and most of all clear for the students.*
- ✓ *HEIs in each territory would benefit from seeing clear examples of local best practice – starting with examples from our ALIGN peer reviews (module descriptors from one university, a clear exposition of IT student feedback in another university, clear expositions of a third university’s relationships with employers and ‘workplace’ teaching arrangements etc.)*

Thus typical recommendations to the Governments are summed up in the following points:

- A Student Centred Approach
- Using Learning Outcomes
- Using ECTS
- Clearly developed (and evolving) internationally accepted NFQ
- Involving students in programme development, monitoring and evaluation/validation
- Involving stakeholders (esp. industry and employers) in programmedevelopment,monitoringandevaluation/validation
- Autonomy for HEIs and for programme teams
- Ongoing, continuous staff training and development
- Internationalisation, staff and student mobility (in and out)
- Peer review as part of evaluation/validation
- Consistent terminology. Choice of language. Benchmarking. etc.

## DISSEMINATION



ALIGN web-site and Facebook pages are regularly updated to provide information about ALIGN activities and events.



Newsletters and booklets were published both by the coordinating institution (Yerevan Brusov State University of Languages and Social Sciences) about the project activities and achievements in general and by the partners about their contribution and participation in the project.

## ALIGN

ACHIEVING AND CHECKING THE ALIGNMENT BETWEEN  
ACADEMIC PROGRAMMES AND QUALIFICATION FRAMEWORKS

ABOUT PARTNERS BOARD PUBLICATIONS EVENTS

### News

#### DEVELOPMENT OF NATIONAL GUIDELINES FOR ALIGNMENT



UKRAINE



ARMENIA



RUSSIA

After successful implementation of Work Package 1, TEMPUS ALIGN project passed on to the next stage. Within Work Packages 2 and 3 each partner country involved in the project (*armenia, Russia and Ukraine*) has established a National Working Group which works on the development of National Guidelines comprising mechanisms and tools ensuring the alignment of academic programs with National Qualifications Frameworks.

Parallel to the works of National Groups, each university has established its own Working Groups on the institutional and program levels to develop road maps, policies and procedures for alignment.

The Working Groups regularly organize meetings and discussions to foster the successful continuation of ALIGN project.



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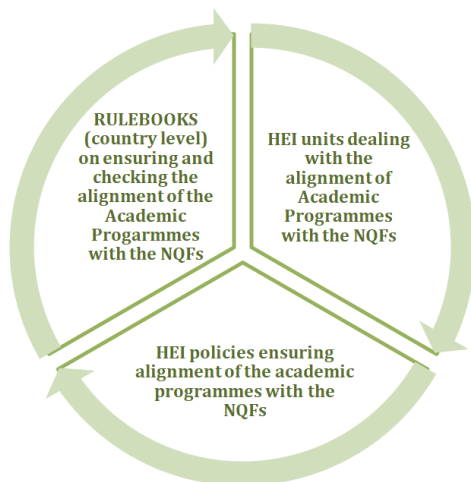


Dissemination conferences and round table discussions were organized by partner institutions within ALIGN project:

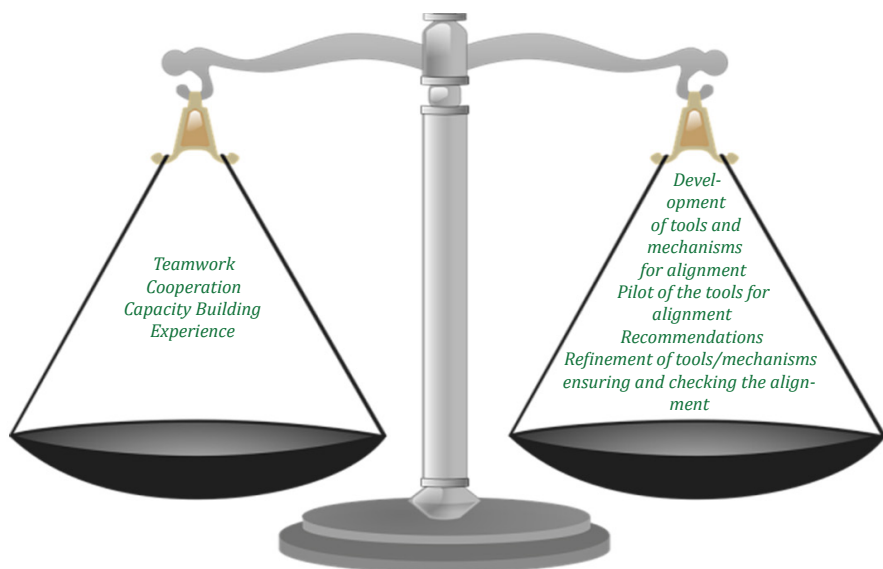
- ▶ *“ALIGN day” within QWeek events (December 2014, February 2017, Yerevan)* ALIGN was represented by project partners during the Quality Week (QWeek) events organized by National Center for Professional Education Quality Assurance Foundation (ANQA). During each QWeek events a number of national and international experts are present as

well as representatives from all HEIs in Armenia.

- ▶ *Dissemination event in Russia (November 2015, Moscow)* ALIGN Russian partners organized a two-day international conference on “Enhancing the Quality and Relevance of Students’ Learning Experience” with the participation of ALIGN consortium as well as other interested parties from different institutions of Russia.
- ▶ *Round table discussions (2014-2017)* Working groups from partner institutions of ALIGN project regularly organized round table discussions with different stakeholders of HEIs to discuss the issues of alignment with them and to gather ideas for the revision of the selected academic programs.
- ▶ *Dissemination event in Ukraine (October 2017, Kiev)* ALIGN Ukrainian partners organized a dissemination event with the participation of ALIGN consortium as well as other interested parties from different institutions of Ukraine for the dissemination of information about the main activities carried out within ALIGN project by Ukrainian partners and the major outcomes.
- ▶ *Final Conference (October, 2017, Yerevan)* - final conference of ALIGN project took place on 10th October, 2017. Overall achievements and outcomes of the project were outlined and presented by partner institutions. Panel discussions were organized to share ideas about alignment and to make grounds for the sustainability of the project and its outcomes. The following factors for sustainability are given much importance to:



## Impact of the project:



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ALIGN consortium would like to extend its heartfelt gratitude to the International Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE) for its invaluable contribution to the HE quality assurance system development in Armenia, Russia and Ukraine.

Specials thanks go to all the project partners for the commitment, active cooperation, support and participation in the project activities and developments, for the contribution to the preparation of the booklet on achievements.

ALIGN team also thanks Armenian, Russian, Ukrainian partner HEIs and Quality Assurance Agencies for developing tools and mechanisms on ensuring and checking the alignment of the Academic Programmes with the National Qualification Frameworks.

It also thanks Armenian, Russian and Ukrainian student associations, unions of industrialists and employers, as well as ministries for the support and feedback to the developments.

Special thanks go to EU partners from Ireland, UK, Poland, Germany and Belgium for sharing their experience, bringing best practice and for the huge support and contribution to the developments of alignment tools and mechanisms and for the recommendations to further improvements.

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